Ageless Rubinstein 'Masterly'

Symphony's Fourth Program Of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven

By MICHAEL HOLMBERG, Press Music Writer

There is a moment close to the end of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto when the violas, normally the most acquiescent of the fiddle family, suddenly take it upon themselves to confiscate the flighty theme of the piano and turn it into a four-square anthem.

At this moment, you are hearing not so much a musical work as the voice of Beethoven, speaking to you over a void of 160 years.

It is said that, of all the arts, music is the most vague. Prose and poetry are there to see. So is painting. Music is something intangible that tells you nothing definite but gives you the clues and leaves the rest to your imagination.

It was like that last night at Syria Mosque when Artur Rubinstein played the Beethoven concerto with William Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Symphony.

The violas reached out and spoke to you. Earlier, in the great key change that begins the concerto, the orchestra again had seemed almost to be trying to put something into words. It was the same with the opening bars of Mozart's Symphony No. 29, which was also on the program.

What the music was saying was a point for each individual listener to decide—and this is the greatness of fine classical music; it says something to everyone, never the same to two people, but something that is there for the benefit of those who are aware.

Rubinstein's performance and Steinberg's direction last night were masterly. The ageless pianist, whom age cannot wither nor custom stale, is still the master showman, still possessed of olympian calm and poetry in his fingers.

It was the fourth of this year's Haydn-Mozart-Beethoven programs and, though this may seem an old-fashioned attitude to take, it will be sad when the cycle is over. The more one hears of the music of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the more one discovers how fortunate we are still to have the enduring richness of the three masters from Vienna.

There were some last night who found the Mozart 29th and the Haydn 101st Symphonies dull.

This is a shame, because these two works—the one an early work by an 18-year-old genius and the other the result of a lifetime's experience—form the very backbone of our musical culture. Without Haydn and Mozart there never could have been a Beethoven.

You cannot sit back and let this music bash you over the head with the obvious force of Tchaikovsky. You have listen to the grace, wisdom and logic inherent in it—and you need to hear performances that underline these qualities.

Such were the performances given by the Pittsburgh Symphony last night. As far as this listener was concerned, it was a program of pure, civilized joy. Try it for yourself on Sunday at 3:10 p. m.